

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. preached non violence and conflict resolution: How would you apply his teachings to address crime in The Bahamas?

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It is disheartening to think that such a strong, soulful group of people who have ancestral ties to world heroes such as Dr. King and Rosa Parks would want to harm each other. "Where do we go from here"? What would Dr. King think of us? In The Bahamas, crime and violence are elevating now more than ever. Like Dr. Martin Luther King, I hope for a better world -- in my case a better Bahamas. It is scary for me to listen to the radio and every other day to hear of a murder. This nation we call "Christian" could be doomed; something must be done to combat the excessive violence in this country. I truly believe if we all work together to design a plan of action, we can greatly decrease the violence. We can shine light into this darkness as Dr. King admonished us to do.

I say coward is the man who refuses to walk away while he still can walk. Crime and violence are caused because individuals are not able to rationalize problems. In many cases, communication could have saved lives. My mother always reminded me that if you don't follow up an argument, the other party will likely feel shame and discontinue the pursuit. Walking away from foolish conflicts results in spiritual growth and is certainly a win-win situation. We must learn to be more proactive instead of reactive. If in your life someone has done you wrong, it is always better to allow God to take care of the justice you deserve.

Dr. King believed that the best non-violent resolution was the power of love. The kind of love he referred to was redemptive love. According to King, "It is an overflowing love which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless, and creative. It is not set in motion by any quality or function of its object. It is the love of God operating in the human heart. The act of loving is not for one's own good, but for the good of another. It does not distinguish between worthy and unworthy people or friends and enemies . . . a willingness to forgive, not seven times, but seventy times to restore community" (McElrath, n.d.). One must respond to hate with love in order to avoid conflicts because "returning violence for violence multiplies violence" as stated by Dr. Martin Luther King.

Many people would agree with me when I say that the factor that contributes to most of the crime and violence is lack of good parenting. Many children are growing up in unstable homes without a positive role model or someone to set a good example. This and other related aspects must be examined to find possible solutions. Based on local news reports, it appears that crime and violence are mostly committed by individuals between the ages of 15-25, who don't recognize that any conflict can be dealt with in a logical way. I don't feel that the guidance counselors and teachers in the schools are doing all that they can to teach children how to resolve problems. Conflict resolution courses should be implemented in schools.

The church could also help, because in times like this we must call on the Lord for help. The community can also play a big role by creating and executing opportunities for meaningful skill training and gainful employment for young people because the devil finds work for idle hands to do. Dr. Martin Luther King preached about a kind of love which is needed to foster discipline and understanding. Parents who truly love their children will discipline them and teach them responsibility. Education is the key to ensure a successful future. In The Bahamas, education is basically free for anyone willing to make the most of it. If our youth would take advantage of educational opportunities, they would not have to become involved in illicit behavior. As King stated, "Nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity" (King).

If our children today would use the same energy they put into raising a knife to harm someone into lifting a book to read or simply lifting a pen to do their class-work, we would not have such a critical issue to face in The Bahamas. I feel that there should be more incentives for great academic achievement, thus encouraging children to study and leaving no time for violence. As much as I would like to see world peace, I must also realize that in this world you will always have trouble, but Jesus said: "I have overcome the world" (The Bible, as cited in God's Words of Life for Teens, 2000)

The authorities in The Bahamas have become too tolerant of violence. It seems as if the increase is almost accepted now as a way of life and this is sad. If this is not the case, then why is it that persons are being granted bail when they are charged with murder? Then, when set free they commit another crime. Does this mean that our criminal justice system should consider capital punishment? If so, we would be doing the exact opposite of what Dr. King cautioned against: "You can murder a murderer but you can't murder murder". This simply means there is a better way to put an end to crime and violence than killing someone else. We must put our feet down and violators of the law must be punished according to the severity of the crime they commit; no matter who they are. Ironically the persons who should be enforcing the law are the ones breaking it. We need to put away the guns and knives because violence is never going to be the answer to any problem and 'Gang banging' is simply a degradation of one's character. According to King, "A nonviolent protester was as passionate as a violent protester. Despite not being physically aggressive, his mind and emotions are always active" (King). I am not asking you, my fellow Bahamians, to become silent victims. It is in our blood to stand

up, but not in a manner that means putting your brother or sister six feet under.

I proudly stand in the shadow of a great African American who, with his words of wisdom and passion, brought hope, strength and tears to his listeners. How can one person make a difference? Dr. King made a difference. How can I help? Whenever I am faced with conflicts, I do my part to avoid violence and be a good role model. Also, I make a special effort to share these views with my peers every chance I get. I refuse to contribute to the increasing violence in The Bahamas. I genuinely want to make the place where I was born and raised safer to visit and live. We must stand united as one to fight this fight with love as the late Dr. Martin Luther King would want us to do. It is only in this way that 'the chain reaction of evil will be broken'.

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